

Dear CP

Congratulations! There are a few titles, slogan's or experiences you will always carry with you, some good and some not so good. The accomplishment of graduating from Oaks Christian High School is something that should bring you complete satisfaction. The reputation Oaks Christian has is super solid, solid locally, nationally and internationally. It seems anyone who has kids knows of Oaks Christian School. It's a school with a reputation that most high school institutions strive to become. You now have two milestones that you will "forever" be attached to, Oaks Middle School and Oaks Christian High School. Value them. But...What's Next?

I had always been one to reach for the moon and have big goals (over-achiever). My childhood offered no opportunities other than sports as an alternative. If not for athletics, I would likely have not amounted to much and surely, I would not have met your mom and you would not have existed. Your mission trips have exposed pain, loneliness, desperation, poverty and strife. I experienced all those emotions as a kid growing up. However, my blessing was that in my childhood I had the benefit of having two parents around through my growing years who infused love to the best of their ability, though with 9 kids the love was often diluted because it had to be shared.

There are so many experiences I have had that if not for my sure persistence, heart and will (to never quit), they would never have materialized. Most notably my position as a police captain. For me, that is the realization of over 5 decades of life experience. I had to overcome obstacles, setbacks, and deal with failure (but failing and continuing to work at anything builds character). It took opportunity, hard work and commitment. Add compassion, kindness and genuine care for people and good things happen.

I have fewer things to live for as I consider myself to have had a pretty full life. One of the chief reasons I "look forward" is to see and share the life you will make for yourself. I have seen Chad make a very nice life for Alina and their son. He embodies goodness and has a heart to help those who need a hand-up, not a hand-out. He is educated and has core values that make him a good man, husband and father. For most parents, their children's lives validate or invalidate them as people and as parents. For most, the ultimate final grade a parent will ever get is in the hands of their kids. That grade comes by the way their children live their lives. And it's not necessarily measured by status, wealth, houses or cars, (though American societal values will say otherwise). It's in the number of lives you will touch, the number of people you will teach and the love you will share with those who are in your daily life (family/friends/community). And much of that starts with a basic question.

"Is this person likeable?"

So many people will evaluate you ALWAYS on that basic question. It's the basis of everything in the beginning.

Cole, you are the most likeable person I have ever met. I have never met a person, (and I know many) who has not met you, and found you so likeable. Your sincerity, handshake, and eye-contact, and your smile touch everyone instantly. Your body language is likeable. That is a very important trait that a man can have. Instant likeability. From there, you can navigate your road in life anywhere in want to or need to go. NO one has such likeability as you.

At work, the most basic test of anyone's character today is the quality the person, police officer, leader, community member, politician, etc. The most automatic response always starts out with, "He is (fill in the blank)." You will always be blessed and get the response "He is a good man, he is a quality guy, he is likeable." Now, ***what you do with that from that moment forward is up to you*** because your reputation will be made on the "what's next." Did you keep your commitments? Were you engaged? Did you care? Did you listen? Did you follow-through?

Quite simply, you have the characteristics of such a great man, and will always stand out due to your height, your handsome looks and warm smile (and you are very **smart** and have **depth of knowledge, and are articulate**). The challenge is so many will come to expect much of you because of those initial qualities. Your employers, your girlfriend(s), your wife, your neighbors, family, friends and co-workers will come to have super big hopes and expectations. You will always bear the burden of conditional love (unfortunately). You will receive or not receive love based on whether or not you fulfill the expectations of those around you. That's where the what's-next matters. It has kind of' been that way your whole life already. Very few people just "accept" you.

As much you just want to experience the rawness of just being loved because you are a breathing human being, our family has not allowed it, & nor will this world. That is dark but real. So, what do you do? How do you become the complete person? I would suggest fulfilling your expectations of **YOU** first before turning and trying to please others. What expectations have you set for yourself?

You have such an ability to amass a fortune of wealth in world. More than most because you see the heart of the word, you know value of love, compassion and community. Very rare qualities for a young man. And yes, you can know financial wealth too if you follow a course that is greater than your dreams. Do you dream big or dream safe? If you spent a little time with Dave Anderson or listened to his material and followed through you would be a multi-millionaire. You could be a CEO of billion-dollar business, a politician, or live in a foreign country serving the poor and be the wealthiest person in our family. But those in your world will never validate a life for you of not amounting to much, nor could I as your father, because you are so gifted with traits very few people have. You are hands down the most talked about person in my circle of community when we talk about our families and children. You leave such an impression on people. A great impression.

So, what will you do?

Only you hold the answer.

I would suggest building a war chest of collegiate experience, internships, employment, community work as a roadmap for the next few years. But I would latch onto those who are in our lives now and tutor under them to take a cleaner route.

Thank you for your love. The experiences I share with you are some if not the greatest of my life. I know at times it has felt like it's me and you against the world. That has only made me bond closer to you and have depth of love with you. You have been such a great kid and have helped me so much for almost 20 years. When I see how we live our daily lives, whether it be in our garage, my work office, or my heart, I see you plastered all over the place. My one on one time with you is so great because you are so accepting of me and you allow me to be me without exacting something in return. Each day you ask how my work day was and show me you care. When we are together you always let me choose whatever we are doing, eating, going or buying as a way of telling me the only thing that matters is that we are together.

I hope I have been a living exemplar of loving and living a life of Christ-likeness, goodness and care. My failures or shortcomings are plenty but my heart is always ripe and intentioned to offer peace, kindness, love, inspiration, explanation and encouragement.

I look back on 19 years of your passions and know so well that you have identified with topics of deep interest (Legos, movies, sneakers, eBay & sports). Those passions are the things that will fuel interest, drive learning, and instill knowledge and wisdom. As you plan your life please don't settle on anything less than OR your life will be incomplete.

Life has been challenging for you as the "what's next" part of your life has slowly developed. I know we have had our struggles at times, but remember that I'm hard on you because I believe in you, I hold you accountable because I care and I stretch you so you never have to regret giving less than your best.

The love we have for you, both your Mom and I, is un-comparable love. The amount of time, attention, discussion and will to maximize your ability to be great or good at "what's next" has stifled us at times and caused family conflict. I know deep in your heart you value the love and effort we have made to get you to your Godly potential. It is our hope to see you become a Christ-like champion of God, respectful son of Jesus and a decent, grateful and respectful son of your parents. It's that simple.

So, what's next for Cole Palka?

My undying love.

Dad

